Dany Laferrière was born in Port-au-Prince in 1953. In 1987, the same year François "Papa Doc" Duvalier came to power, Laferrière was sent to the rural town of Petit-Gourde to live with his grandmother, Da. Soon after, his father was sent into exile by Papa Doc, never to return to Haiti. In order to continue his studies, Laferrière was sent back to Port-au-Prince in 1984 to live with his mother, sister and some of his aunts. In the early 1970s, Laferrière was publishing in the Nouvelliste, Haiti's oldest daily newspaper and getting involved with Port-au-Prince's burgeoning new literary scene. In 1976, one of Laferrière's closest friends and fellow clowns was murdered by Jean-Claude "Bébé Doc" Duvalier. Fearing for his life, Laferrière flees for Montreal. As he has outlined himself, Montreal is where he became a writer (Laferrière 2000, n.p.):

Et la chance de ma vie est arrivée quand j'ai dû partir précipitamment pour Montréal au lieu de Paris qui était ma destination normale. Je suis devenu du jour au lendemain un ouvrier. ...Cette situation nouvelle et inouïé m'avait permis de devenir responsable de ma vie. J'avais brusquement les pieds sur terre. Quelle terre? L'Amérique. ...Tous de suite la question: que ferais-je pour vivre? J'ai pris la décision d'écrire un livre. J'ai dû considérer le métier d'écrivain comme ma dernière chance pour sortir de l'isolement dont je me crevais littéralement.

Laferrière began writing what is now known as his "Autobiographie américaine" (American Autobiography), which consists of now twelve titles and tells Laferrière's story: living and being a writer in North America, growing up in Haiti and finally, returning to Haiti after his extended absence.

Laferrière's first novel, Comment faire l'amour avec un Nègre sans se fatiguer (translated as How to Make Love to a Negro) appeared in 1983 and it became a literary sensation. Exploding the myth of the Black stud, Laferrière shocked audiences and announced his presence as a writer. Laferrière wanted to confront all expectations, all conventions that come with being a writer from Haiti specifically and the Caribbean more generally: "Rien du caribéen, où l'érotisme est généralement solaire, tropical et consommable" (Laferrière 2000, n.p.) [Nothing Caribbean, where eroticism is generally solar, tropical and consumable]. No looking back, no nostalgia, no folklore. This is especially true of his first novel: if you did not know the details of the author's life, you would never know from the text that the narrator (named "Vieux" and the author's alter ego in all his stories) was from Haiti. All you knew of him is that he is Black, French and newly arrived in Montreal. But without folklore, nostalgia or looking back, how is an author supposed to recreate his story, their autobiography?

Éroschina, or Putting the Pieces Together

His second novel, Éroschina is Laferrière's least studied work.14 The story seems to pick up where How To leaves off: the book opens on a recently arrived Black man (Vieux) taking refuge in his lover's apartment. His lover, Holik, is a Japanese-Canadian, born in Vancouver, and a photographer. She leaves Vieux alone in Montreal as she travels to New York because of John Lennon's death. The novel is structured as a series of vignettes, or fragments, much like photographs in their incompelent form.15 The book follows the form of the Japanese Haiku poem: the first section is composed of 15 chapters, consisting of 150 unequal fragments, followed by 15 more fragments/chapters (Mathis-Moset 188). Laferrière once again is upsetting the reader's expectations of a novel.

While sex and sensuality certainly play a role in the novel, what seems to be one of the unifying themes of the narrative is the need to deal with trauma: in this instance, the traumas of World War I, the Holocaust, and the bombing of Hiroshima. Holik's parents were in Tokyo when the bomb struck, while her grandfather was in Hiroshima and was left blinded and deaf by the explosion. The narrator also interacts with other Japanese expatriates who deal with the Bomb in their own individual ways, as well as Jews in New York and a young German woman who smelled like death (Éroschina 106). Vieux communes with authors such as Céline, Moravia, Hubert Selby Jr. and Norman Mailer and their views on the atomic bomb. This cataclysmic event touched everyone around the globe and cut the 20th Century in half—life before and after the atomic bomb. But what these fragments also show is how each constructs the bomb and the memory of the trauma, even felt from afar.

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13 Céline, Moravia, Hubert Selby Jr. and Norman Mailer tend to gloss over the novel when looking at Laferrière's North American works, focusing instead on the other three.

14 This is observed by Ursula Mathis-Moset in Dany Laferrière: Le dérèglement américain (2003), page 107.

15 All translations, unless otherwise noted, are provided by the author of this essay.

16 See, among others, Père comme je suis, pages 104-109.

17 The biographical information is taken from Je suis fatigué, pages 211-217.
Towards the end of the novel, Laferrière quotes a Japanese photographer who travelled to Hiroshima to chronicle the aftermath of the bomb. He quotes:

Pourrais-je même commencer avec les souffrances des victimes, qu'en sait-il de résultat? Tout ce que je perçois, c'est le profond fossé entre les victimes de cette bombe atomique et les gens ordinaires. Il me faut reconnaître que cette collection de photographies ne suffit pas à combler ce fossé. Me resterait-il encore quelque chose à faire à ce propos, sinon admettre la honte de mon point de vue d'artiste. (133)

[Could I even achieve a communion with the suffering of the victims and what would be the result? All I can perceive is the deep chasm that exists between the victims of the atomic bomb and the rest of us. I have to recognize that this collection of photographs is not enough to bridge that chasm. I yet have work to do in this domain, or else admit my failure as an artist.]

This quote comes immediately after a section describing Port-au-Prince, Haiti; Laferrière's first mention of his past life, the life before he moved to Montreal. This scene would re-appear in *Le goût des jeunes filles* (1992), his second novel dealing with his life and childhood in Haiti under the Duvalier dictatorship. This juxtaposition of scenes is not by accident and would seem to point us to Laferrière's effort to work through his own fragmented life, pre- and post-exile. It is worth noting that the novel immediately following *Eroschina* is *Le Lendemain du café* (*An Aroma of Coffee*), describing some of his time living with his grandmother in Petit-Goâve in rural Haiti.

It is also interesting to note the discord between Laferrière's choice to use the Haiku and his general revulsion of nature or the rural. The Haiku is traditionally used exclusively to describe nature and the natural world. Laferrière, on the other hand, "Je suis urbain jusqu'au bout des ongles. Mes vaches sont des veuves. Paï l'horrer de la campagne" (40) "I am urban up to the tips of my fingers. My cows are orphans. I hate the countryside.

Nothing of the stereotypical tropical world here. But could the Haiku, then, be Laferrière's attempt to bridge the gap between the horrors of the rural and his own warm memories of growing up with his beloved grandmother? Japan, it is revealed at the very end of the novel, also represents for the author an opportunity at complete and total anonymity, and thus freedom, a luxury he was never afforded in Haiti.


[The final scene, I see myself in a little town in Japan. Not knowing where I am. Not knowing the language. Not recognizing the scenery. Ignorant of the codes. I see myself wandering the streets. Not as a tourist, nor as a traveler, but searching for my destiny. And finding my death.]

Again, note how Laferrière is looking to lose himself in a small town, not the urban environment he had created earlier in the narrative. Is this nostalgia for that time before, growing up in a small, rural village, that the ultimate result of this voyage, in fact of any voyage or journey, is his death. Japan might be foreign and far from his experiences in Haiti and Montreal, but death comes to us all, no matter how we may try to reinvent or hide ourselves from it.

Je suis un écrivain japonais, or Losing Yourself

After a hiatus of a little over eight years, Laferrière returned to writing novels with *Je suis un écrivain japonais*. He admitted earlier, in *Ecriva comme je veux*, that his dream was to write a novel with that title (106). The opening scene the narrator talking to his editor on the phone and proposing the title for his forthcoming novel. Immediately, the narrator is paralyzed with the reality of both having to write the book and having to justify the choice of title. He seeks out a Japanese woman to be able to study her and, in theory, learn about the Land of the Rising Sun. The narrator is pointed to Midori, the latest underground artist to hit Montreal. The narrator is pulled into the fantastic world of Midori and her group of hangers-on, all Japanese lesbians, each hiding secrets from the other.

The structure of the novel closely resembles that of *Eroschina*. The image of photography dominates the narrative and once again the chapters are less chapters in a traditional sense than are snapshots or episodes described by the author. The narrator likens himself to a camera, but instead of capturing the immobile, he captures the living, breathing emotion behind the moment (*Ecriva comme je veux*).

Je n’ai jamais eu d’appareil de photo. C’est que je ne comprends pas tout à fait son usage. Si c’est pour faire des photos que je ne regarderai pas, alors on peut dire que c’est l’invention la plus bête qui soit. J’en ai déjà un qui fonctionne très bien. Cette boîte criminelle où j’ai classé cinquante ans d’images dont la plupart se repétent jusqu’à former le tissu de ma vie ordinaire. (42)

[I’ve never owned a camera. I just don’t understand its purpose. If it’s for taking pictures I will never look at them, so we could say it’s the dumbest invention ever. I already have one that works quite well. This brain-box where I have organized fifty years of images that keep repeating themselves to point where they form the fabric of my everyday life.]

Slowly and surely throughout the narrative, the narrator becomes more and more uncertain about the reliability of his own memories, memories that he has, indeed been repeating in his books over the years, memories that are repeated and restated, albeit slightly modified here in the novel.

One of the books that the narrator reads is *Les grecs ont-ils cru leurs mythes?* by Paul Veyne (Did the Greeks Believe in Myths?). In it, Veyne writes, “truths are already the products of imagination and that the imagination has always governed. It is imagination that rules, not reality, reason, or the ongoing work of the negative.” (xxi). So if the narrator’s brain is his imperfect camera, and it is only from imagination that the truth comes forward, is it any surprise that towards the end of the narrative, we discover he has all been a dream? The hints lie in the familiarity of many of the snapshots the author presents to us. There is one scene in a bathroom at a club where one of Midori’s engravings seduces one of her groupies. Both Japanese and both female, they perform for the narrator’s (and Midori’s) benefit (45-65). A remarkably similar scene takes place in *Eroschina* this time the narrator has accidentally gone into the women’s washroom at the San Juan airport. Two locals (women, and judging by the description, Puerto Rican) who work at the airport end up having sex in the bathroom with the narrator looking on (13-16). Midori and her groupies also closely resemble the Haitian girls who lived across the street from the narrator when he was a young boy in Port-au-Prince and described in his book *Le goût des jeunes filles*: a clear leader with the girls circling around her, each one with their own inner-lives, secrets, and fears. Has the fantasy been fueled by reality or the other way around? Are women everywhere the
same or is he just imagining them to be? Does it matter? The biggest difference, other than race, is that the girls of the narrator's youth were, essentially, prostitutes, while Midori is an artist. Is there a difference?

Je suis un enfant japonais: Says Who?

Two other major questions dominate the narrative: who is the artist and who controls them and their works? A small episode early in the narrative could be seen as a mise-en-abyme for the entire book: Icelandic pop singer Bjork, we are told, is enamored and obsessed with Haitian Primitive art and voodoo. The reason is that when she was a little girl, she was given a Voodoo doll that fascinated her and fueled her imagination. In the narrative, the Montreal Museum of Fine Art is hosting an exhibit of primitive works from Haiti and Bjork changes her schedule, the schedule of the museum and the artists so she can enjoy the paintings and meet the artists. It is revealed, however, that Bjork isn't Bjork but is actually the voodoo doll, having somehow switched places during the course of their time together. The end of the episode sees one of the old Haitian painters take Bjork the voodoo doll and place her in his pocket to take home with him to Haiti.

The symbol of the voodoo doll is a loaded one. The voodoo doll, as it has come to be understood, is a representation of a person that can be manipulated, through magic and ritual, as the owner of the doll sees fit. Often we see images in popular culture of the seemly sticking pins in a doll representing the person who had wronged them. However, voodoo dolls have nothing to do with Haitian Vodou but are instead an American invention, often paired with zombies and Satanism to portray Vodou and its practitioners (often Haitians) in a negative light. Here we see how religious belief is transformed and manipulated, then wrongly attributed and associated with a culture.

Bjork is an international pop star, and while her home country is Iceland, there isn't anything particularly Icelandic about her music. In an interview in 2006 in the Guardian, Bjork says: "Most people in Iceland are blonde and blue-eyed. I was nicknamed "China girl" in school 'cos they thought I looked Asian. And most people in Iceland didn't like what I was and my mates were doing. It took the English to discover it" ("Being different"). Her work has always incorporated music and influences from around the world ("Bjork"). She is also an artist who has constantly reinvented herself, from 11-year-old girl in Iceland, to punk music icon (The Sugarcubes, to Oscar-nominated songwriter). As the narrator explains in the book, "Ce petit bout de femme dont le nez peut rendre stupide un peintre second de la modernité. Juste dire Bjork" (Je suis 57). This tiny woman whose name can make the most fertile minds turn stupid. Just hearing the name Bjork. The pop star has become almost magical in her ability to get people to do her bidding and bend to her will. Could it be the magic of the voodoo god, Erzulie?

The particular doll Bjork was given is revealed to be not just any representation, but a representation of Erzulie Dantor, "la plus terrible" (Je suis 50). I am including this particularly long passage on Erzulie (the more common name of Erzulie) by Joan Dayan because it powerfully develops the questions that Lafcadio is asking in this narrative:

What is the best kind of submission? You cannot surrender your will, you cannot be possessed unless your body becomes the vessel for the master's desire. The body must be owned, made into property, for possession to take place...I want to reflect on a goddess called Erzulie in Haiti by thinking about the ways in which a word like possession, so powerful in the Western imagination, becomes in the figure of Erzulie something like collective physical numenbance. The history of slavery is given substance through time by a spirit that originated in an experience of domination. That domination was most often experienced by women under another name, something called "love." (Dayan 55-6)

Erzulie is a goddess "born on the soil of Haiti who has no precedent in Yoruba or Dahomey" (58). She is said to be "the most powerful and arbitrary gods in vodou" and "the most contumaciously a spirit of love who forbids love, a woman who is the most beloved yet herself feels the most betrayed" (59). In ceremonies, Erzulie is honored through the most luxurious items: "lace, parfums, jewels, and sweets" (58). Most importantly, perhaps, for the discussion here is that "Erzulie demands that the world be reinvented" (63).

We have many layers of ownership or possession in this short part of the narrative: Bjork owns the doll, who thus takes possession of Bjork's life, which is described as a fantasy. She (although which "she" isn't entirely clear) wishes to go and see the art of Haitian primitive painters, on exhibit in Montreal (it is made clear in the narrative that the paintings are not owned by the painters) and to meet the artists themselves, who then take possession of the doll/goddess/pop singer to return with them to Haiti. It is also made clear that Bjork belongs to no particular place because of her constant touring. While Bjork/Erzulie may own much in terms of power over people in order to get what she wants, she holds a secret that allowed for the old and impoverished painters to overcome that power and put her in her pocket.

Is this a reflection of Lafcadio's own existence? He created an alter-ego in the form of the narrator/narrative voice of all of his autobiographical novels, Victor/Vera Os, a name given to him by his beloved grandmother. Has this person escaped his control? Are there cracks beginning to show in the carefully scripted narrative Lafcadio has created about himself? Can Lafcadio, like Bjork, turn himself into something more than a Haitian writer, or, like this small episode illustrates is that what he really wants? What is sacrificed in the quest to become an international artist, to becoming something different, something new, a Japanese writer?

The narrator is not an artist who is creating his art on his own terms. The narrative begins with a call from his editor in Paris, remnants of colonial times past, insisting that the narrator get started on the book that was promised. Once the narrator announces that he is writing a book titled "I am a Japanese writer," he slowly loses control over the story and himself. The Japanese Consulate hears about the book and the narrator immediately becomes a celebrity overseas. He receives prank calls from Japan. He receives gifts of Japanese culture in order to better understand his perceived subject. But the final straw for the author comes when a line of Japanese tourists, armed with their cameras, show up at the door of his apartment to have their picture taken with this "Japanese" author, this oddity and Japanese superstar.

The reason why he runs away goes back to his aversion to cameras and a slow evolution of how he understands the Japanese obsession with taking pictures. At the beginning of the narrator, he observes: "Le Japonais devient lors aussi intemporel que la tour Eiffel. On pourrait croire qu'elle est la tour Eiffel qui se fait photographier derrière un Japonais turquain" (Je suis 43). [The Japanese becomes as timeless as the Eiffel Tower. We might believe that it's the Eiffel Tower being photographed behind a smiling Japanese person] Towards the end of the narration, however, he comes back to this picture (or these pictures) of the Japanese person standing in front of monuments in exactly the same pose:

84
Peut-être qu'ils stockent les photos pour qu'on puisse avoir une idée plus tard de notre manière de vivre au début du XXIe siècle. Ce serait des informations pas trop diversifiées. Si on tombait un jour, sur ces montages de photos, on risquerait d'avoir l'impression que la Terre n'était pas peuplée, à l'époque, que des Japonais. Il n'y a pas un seul monument digne de mention, sur cette planète, qui n'ait pas été colonisé par eux. C'est une conquête mondiale. (176-77)

[Maybe they're keeping the pictures so we can have an idea later what life was like at the beginning of the 21st century. It won't be tremendously diverse information as the billions of pictures taken by the Japanese only show other Japanese smiling. If we find, one day, these assemblies of pictures, we might think that the Earth at this time was only populated by the Japanese. There isn't one single monument on this planet that they haven't colonized. It's world domination.]

The narrator, while claiming to be a Japanese writer, does not want to be possessed or colonized by this army of Japanese tourists/photographers/colonizers.

But there is something else possessing him, too. The narrator at one point describes himself as being completely invisible, where “mes yeux restent ouverts, j'entends tout, mais je ne suis pas là” (190) [my eyes stay open, I hear everything, I'm not really here]. This sounds like he has been turned into a zombie, a powerful video image. In Haiti, “Le zombi...” is the most powerful figure in Haitian belief. But fate is more feared. The zombie...hauts Planchers is the most powerful symbol of apathy, anonymity, and loss” (Doyan 37). The zombie is “a soulless husk deprived of freedom” (37). The question remains, what is depriving the narrator of his freedom, rending him in this state of paralysis? This invisibility comes before the Japanese photographers show up at his door, effectively knocking him out of his trance, but the question remains, what is holding the author back?

Throughout the book, the narrator keeps insisting that he has not yet even written the book, only the title. The artist has lost control of his art even before setting pen to paper. The narrator also tries to be very clear. “Ecoutez, je n’écris pas sur le Japon, monsieur... j’écris sur moi. C’est moi le Japon. Comme de fois de toi-je vous le répétez” (161). [Listen, I'm not writing about Japan, sir... I'm writing about myself... I am Japan. How many times do I have to tell you?] And to why chose the title, he claims, “Je l’ai fait pour sentir précisément de qui, pour montrer qu’il n’y a pas de frontière... j’en avais marre des nationalismes culturels. Qui peut m’empêcher d’être un vrai Japonais? Personne” (198) [I'm doing this for precisely that reason, to show there aren't borders... I had it with cultural nationalism. Who can stop me from being a Japanese writer? No one.] But the book within the narrative never gets written, and the narrator is pushed further and further into the margins of borders of society, becoming homeless and transient, much in the same way he was when he first arrived in Montreal, described in Chronique de la dérive danse (A Drifting Year). The narrator can claim that all borders have disappeared but there are still barriers within himself to being able to write and thus not actually able to become a Japanese writer.

The Narrow Road to the Deep North

The narrator is constantly reading the Japanese poet Basho and his travel essay, The Narrow Road to the Deep North. If the narrator is critical of other appropriating his art, the artist, he himself has no such problems. In an early chapter/fragment, the narrator references parts of Basho's essay to fit what he is doing at that moment, traveling on the Montreal Metro. For the narrator, “aucun frontière entre la littérature et la vie” (32) [no barrier between literature and life]. This could neatly sum up the narrator's Laferrère's art: as the title of a book-length interview suggests, J'écrit comme je vis (I write as I live), Laferrère's life has been a literal open book. He has written about his entire life: his childhood in Haiti, his forced exile to Montreal, and his eventual return to Haiti. But, this is not entirely the truth, either. There are a number of people who have never appeared or have been dealt with in his autobiographical works: his sister, his wife (because she asked him to never include her in his books), the man of his family (Le génie des femmes is dedicated to the men in his family, as an apology and explanation for the omission), and most notably, his father. So there are still borders that have yet to be crossed for the author before he can really write as he lives (and vice versa).

Basho plays an important role in this journey. Another artistic kindred spirit, Basho was forced to travel because of circumstances and then chose to travel late in his life. His greatest voyage, the one he documents in The Narrow Road to the Deep North, is one that was important to Basho: "in the imagination of the people at least, the North was largely an unexplored territory, and it represented for Basho all the mystery there was in the universe. In other words, the Narrow Road to the Deep North was life itself for Basho, and he travelled through it as anyone would travel through the short span of his life here — seeking a vision of eternity in the things that are, by their very own nature, destined to perish" (Yasui 37). Like Laferrère, Basho was taking the journey after a long and illustrious career as a writer, but still searching for something illustrative.

His own journey begins when he is forced out of his home due to the aforementioned Japanese tourists. As he wanders the streets of Montreal homeless, penniless, and alone, he crosses an old friend from Haiti, François, whose life has been somewhat parallel to his own: the narrator wrote for the newspaper at Haiti, François did radio, and they were both forced out of Haiti at the same time, ending up in Montreal. François, however, has been much more prosperous than the narrator: he has married a Spanish-Japanese woman, become a wealthy businessman and moved to the suburbs. But all he apparently ever talks about is the narrator: "J’avais l’impression de lui appartenir. Avec sa mémoire prodigieuse et si généreuse, il n’eut n’apprenu rien de moi-même. Même moins. [...] c’est lui qui vous aime” (Le sole 214) [I had the impression of belonging to him. With his prodigious and generous memory, he had taken over my life. I was dislodged from myself. We were of those who love you.] Here we come back to the image of Björk being taken by the painters, or the goddess Eilíl who represents both oppression and love. The narrator is having done to him what he himself did to Basho early in the narrative.

In one of the final chapters, "Le moment magique" (the magic moment), the narrator is confronted with the imperfection of his own memory, his own perfect "brain box" of a camera. François was an amateur photographer in his youth and has kept pictures from the days the two spend growing up in Port-au-Prince: "Je n’ai conservé aucune photo de cette période... Je me suis perdu dans un univers... On a deux vies aux mains, une qui s’installe dans notre mémoire comme une pierre au fond de l’eau, et l’autre qui disparait au fur et mesure qu’elle se décompose comme si c’était vaporisé" (215). [I didn't save a single picture from that period... Nothing better than a picture to re-immere yourself in the atmosphere. We have at least two lives. One that anchors in our memory like a rock at the bottom of a body of water and another that disappears as it is happening like water evaporating.] This directly contradicts his early disgust for photographic pictures and his claims to a perfect memory. Are there indeed holes in his memory/life that had rendered his story incomplete? Or is his lack of pictures from that period a willful act of forgetting, referring instead to the metaphoric pictures he keeps in his mind. The remembering is far from painful for him. Nostalgia, it would seem, is comforting, "précieux, mais lourd d’un portier" (220) [precious, but a heavy burden to bear.] And still, he keeps walking and wandering, hoping to get closer to Basho.

The turning point in the novel would seem to hinge on the narrator being able to tell other people’s stories. François’ wife comes to the narrator and begs him to tell her something about her
husband, as all he can talk about is the narrator. The narrator searches his (now admittedly) imperfect memory for a story about François. In a book where fantasy and reality are the same, it is impossible to know if what the narrator eventually tells her is true or simply a way of telling her what she wants to hear. But he shares with her a story of when François was a adolescent, he fell asleep waiting for the narrator to meet him. The narrator found him fast asleep, covered in birds. The narrator stood watching and didn't have the heart to wake François up. The mother thanks him for the story, saying, "Voilà...une histoire qu'il ne peut pas connaître...Et où c'est vous qui le regardez, et non lui qui vous observe. Merci, mon ange..." (233). Finally, a story he cannot know... And where you are watching him and not the other way around. Thank you, my angel..."

His wife now has a secret knowledge about her husband, knows that others were watching (and remembering) him and not just has him understand someone else's life. She also shows the narrator that the importance of the stories about ourselves that even we don't know, allowing another person the power to tell them.

But whose story is the narrator supposed to be telling? I would point again to the Lafèterre's absent father, missing throughout the American Autobiography. Another clue is that the narrator, immediately after the incident with François' wife, tells the story of a mass-murderer who used to live in the same building as him when he first arrived in Montreal. When he saw the killer, Rejean, being carried away to jail, the narrator remarks, "Je connaissais un autre Rejean. Celui qui me racontait ses parties de pêche avec son père. Son enfance en Gaspeaï. On pouvait voir fréquenter la truite dans ses yeux" (239). I knew a different Rejean. The one who told me stories about the fishing trips with his father. His childhood in Gaspeaï. You could see the trout wriggling in his eyes! Even a killer he can have a father he loves and who loved him. Nostalgia, for Rejean, is a source once again of comfort and happy memories.

What is also interesting about this passage is that the killer is from a more rural area of Quebec, north of Montreal. And here is where the narrator would seem to finally let go of his Japanese fantasies. Basho sought for eternity in his own country, in his homeland. While he travelled, he didn't invent any fantastic or fantasy lands to long for, he instead decided to explore and expand his understanding of where he lived and where he was from. The narrator finally lets go of the fantasy of escaping himself, setting himself on his own real journey. The final chapter. "Le dernier voyage" (The final voyage), Lafèterre writes:

Je traverse la rue. Neige lourde et molle. Le soleil disparaît de la fenêtre.
Je traverse la rue. Neige lourde et molle. Le soleil disparaît de la fenêtre.

[I cross the road. Soft, heavy snow. Night falls softly. The cars' break lights are suddenly brighter...I stumble...I continue on my path without ever regaining my balance. There is nothing in front of me but the road. Urban music...Between the cars, I seek the famous barrier to take the "narrow and difficult" road that will lead me to places north.]

This recalls somewhat the ending of Eroshima, where the narrator dreamed of losing himself in a Japanese village. Instead, he finally is able to lose himself in his home city, ready to explore that which has been unexplored: north of Montreal and the story of his father. His next book, L'Engrenage du retour, picks up exactly where he left off, in 1970, and the story of his father's death and the story of his father's life in Haiti as well as his subsequent exile in New York City, ending control of his story. Finally, the narrator can stop running from this part of who he is, apparently, Japan isn't far enough away to run from your secrets and proves that there are still borders that need to be crossed.

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"A Flag without a Nation": Exploring Homeland and Nationhood in Tahmima Anam’s A Golden Age

Aindrilla Guin

Diasporic writers spread across the globe recreate a nation in the mind, an imaginary construct which transcends the strict parameters of nation as a locale with a restricted boundary. The sense of place or nation invoked in the writings of these writers reflects diverse approaches to the concept of space and place. The notion of homeland has undergone close scavenging and microscopic dissection and the meanings evolved cooperative with each other at times and confront at others. The broad spectrum that this term has acquired shows the fast changing nature of the meaning of home and homeland and the changing phases in the existence of diasporic subjects.

Different diasporic writers have different approaches to their place of origin and their present state of existence. Writers as Hanif Kureishi, British diasporic author of Pakistani origin, trace a basic duality in approach to the sense of place in the way the people of the first generation and those of the second generation respond to their present nation. In his seminal novel The Buddha of Suburbia Kureishi closely studies the diverse notions of homeland. While the protagonist Karim, a second generation diasporic subject born of an Asian father and European mother sees Britain as his homeland, his father Haroon, a first generation diasporic finds a rootedness in his place of origin. Nonetheless Karim cuts a pathetic figure as he is betrayed by the colour of his skin. The realization that he is an Asian and the Asians are his people is itself painful and he remains a Westerner to the core, but a sorry case indeed. As Karim perceives,

But I did feel, looking at these strange creatures now—the Indians—that in some way these were my people, and that I'd spent my life denying or avoiding the fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I'd been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them... So if I wanted the additional personality bonus of an English past, I would have to create it (emphasis added) (Kureishi 212-13).

On the other hand Karim's Dad looks back at his land of origin as his native land. “I have lived in the West for most of my life, and I will die here, yet I remain to all intents and purposes an Indian man. I will never be anything but an Indian” (Kureishi The Buddha 253).

A similar duality can be traced in Monica Ali's Brick Lane. The Bangladeshi diasporic writer creates a story where two sisters from the district of Mymensingh in Bangladesh evolve from their narrow confines in the village and journey to the outer world. While the protagonist Nazneen gets wedded off to a middle aged man of Bangladeshi origin residing in London, much senior to her, her sister Hasina takes a dip into her home ambiance of Bangladesh and both perceive home and exile in both the lands which come to the fore in their exchange of experiences. Both the girls experience homeland in different contexts and setting. Hasina becomes trapped in her locale and though she stays in her native Bangladesh, eloping with her lover, she faces no less travail than her sister whose torments surround around her failure to communicate in her new land Britain. However in the course of her stay the foreign land, Nazneen gradually adjusts to her surroundings and assimilates in this new land while her husband Chanu fails to acknowledge Britain as his home.